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ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Lent Term 2020



Happy birthday Wordsworth!
Meet the JCR Co-Presidents
Inside the head of a neuroscientist

Congratulations, welcomes and goodbyes

From opera singer to College Chaplain



A new Chaplain has been appointed to offer welfare support to students, staff and Fellows at St John's.

The Rev'd Andrew Hammond was an undergraduate at Clare College, University of Cambridge, and worked in classical music for nearly 20 years, mostly as an opera singer, and later in arts administration. He was ordained in 2007, and has worked in two London parishes and at St Paul's Cathedral. Before coming to St John's, he was Chaplain at King's College, Cambridge.

Andrew said: "I came to Cambridge as an undergraduate from a very ordinary background in Nottingham, so it took some getting used to but I absolutely loved it. I then went to the Royal Academy of Music and ended

up singing opera professionally. After a few years I decided to move on, and spent several years in arts admin before rediscovering my teenage sense of vocation.

"I returned to Cambridge after nearly 30 years away because I sensed a strong pull to work with students and live in a College environment."

The Chaplain supports the College Tutors who are the primary point of pastoral care for the 900 undergraduate and postgraduate students at St John's.

Andrew added: "Whatever your worry or distress or problem or hurt, come and have a chat. I am super-available, super-non-judgemental, and super-unshockable."

Welcome to our new staff

Rebecca Le Marchand – Library Assistant

Laura Jones – Accommodation & Bookings Co-ordinator

Adele Baxter – Chapel Cleaner

Monika Andrzejewska – Bedmaker

Lorenzo Monaco – Bedmaker

Tim Perrée – Business Analyst

Lynsey Darby – Archivist

Tomasz Gacek – Section Chef

And goodbye to...

Aicha Rehmouni, Senior Catering Assistant in the Fellows' Butler's team, who has just retired after 24 years of service at St John's.

Congratulations to...

Vicky Jeffries (née Flack), Maintenance Payments and Utilities Co-ordinator, who married Steve Jeffries in the Cambridge Registry Office on 29 November. This photo showing the newly married couple covered in confetti takes pride of place above their fireplace!



Welcome to *Eagle Eye*,
the newsletter for staff,
Fellows and students of
St John's College

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Eagle Eye

This newsletter is produced by:
The Communications Office,
St John's College
Editor: Louise Hanzlik,
lh445@cam.ac.uk

Cover image: The rainbow flag flying high above the Great Gate to mark LGBTQ+ History Month. Credit: Nordin Ćatić

Note from the Editor



Welcome to the Lent Term edition of *Eagle Eye*!

In this issue we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Romantic poet William Wordsworth, one of our most famous former students. We learn about his time at St John's in the late 1700s, when he lived in a 'nook obscure' above the College kitchens. It's fair to say that he preferred the Lake District to the 'gloomy Courts' of Cambridge! *Wordsworth at 250*, an exhibition devoted to the poet's life and work, is currently on display in the Library Exhibition Area.

I met the new JCR Co-Presidents, second-year undergraduates Tim d'Aboville and Candela Louzao Carabel. On pages 8-9 they explain why being international students gives them a different perspective on Cambridge, and they tell us

about the changes they'd like to make at St John's. It looks like they are going to have a busy year!

We peek inside the sketchbook of Laura Jones, the newest member of the Accommodation and Bookings Office, who is also a talented illustrator. She has even created an original drawing of King's Parade especially for this edition of the magazine – don't miss it on page 14.

Gav Topley, PhD student and former soldier, took a break from his London Marathon training to tell us why he was locked up in a Bangkok prison, and why he dropped out of his A-levels (the two stories are unrelated!).

And finally, Dr Steve Edgley, who has been the President of St John's since October, explains why robots can't tie shoelaces, and what he'd do in his spare time – if he ever had any.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Eagle Eye*, and if you have any ideas for future editions please do get in touch – we'd love to hear from you.

Best wishes,

Louise

Editor and Web and Internal Communications Officer

News round-up

'Trickster god' used fake news in Babylonian Noah story

An early example of fake news has been found in the 3000-year-old Babylonian story of Noah and the Ark, which is widely believed to have inspired the Biblical tale.

Nine lines etched on ancient clay tablets that tell the Gilgamesh Flood story can now be understood in very different ways – according to a St John's academic.

Dr Martin Worthington's new research analysing the word play in the story has uncovered the duplicitous language of a Babylonian god called Ea, who was motivated by self-interest.

Dr Worthington said: "Ea tricks humanity by spreading fake news. He tells the Babylonian Noah, known as Uta-napishti, to promise his people that food will rain from the sky if they help him build the ark. What the people don't realise is that Ea's nine-line message is a trick: it is a sequence of sounds that can be understood in radically different ways.

"While Ea's message seems to promise a rain of food, its hidden meaning warns of the Flood. Once the ark is built, Uta-napishti and his family clamber aboard and survive with a menagerie of animals. Everyone else drowns. With this early episode, set in mythological time, the manipulation of information and language has begun. It may be the earliest ever example of fake news."

The Gilgamesh Flood story is known from clay tablets that date back around 3000 years. The Flood Tablet in the British Museum, which bears part of the Gilgamesh Flood story, is probably the world's most famous clay tablet, and caused a global sensation when its significance was first discovered by Assyriologist George Smith in 1872.

Heather Hancock appointed as Master



A distinguished new Master has been elected to lead St John's College.

Heather Hancock LVO DL has over two decades' experience in senior leadership in the private and public sectors. She currently chairs the Food Standards Agency, a non-ministerial government department that regulates the food and feed industry. Prior to this, Heather spent 11 years at Deloitte where she was a Managing Partner for the UK and Swiss firms, and led the firm's global services to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Professor Deborah Howard, who chaired the College committee which led the search for the new Master, said: "We are delighted to announce the election of Heather Hancock as the next Master of St John's College. She is a highly distinguished leader who will build on the College's international reputation as a supportive, inclusive, and ambitious academic community."

Heather, who studied Land Economy at St John's, said: "I am deeply honoured to have been elected as the next Master of St John's College. I arrived at St John's as an undergraduate from a northern comprehensive, the first in my family to go to university, and the first pupil from my school in Colne to reach Oxbridge. I know from personal experience the life-changing impact that St John's can deliver. I'm looking forward to sustaining the College's global renown for scholarship and excellence, and to championing its pioneering work on access."

Heather will succeed Professor Sir Christopher Dobson, who was due to retire from the role at the end of the 2019/20 academic year. Sir Christopher died in September 2019 after 12 years as Master.

Heather will take up the role on 1 October 2020.

College computers donated to homeless charity Emmaus

More than 200 used desktop computers have been donated to Emmaus by St John's to be recycled and reused by people who use their services.

The charity provides a home and 'meaningful work' for homeless people.

St John's has also donated printers, monitors, cables, laptops, network switches, and keyboards that were no longer needed. The equipment will be repurposed and sold on at low prices – the money raised will support the activities of the charity, which opened its first UK branch in Cambridge in 1991.

Amy Leung, IT Administrator, came up with the idea of donating to Emmaus. She said: "I'm on the College's Sustainability Committee and wanted to ensure that our computer equipment was recycled locally. We have donated three batches of hardware in the last six months, and we will be donating again in the future. It is great to know we are supporting such a good cause."

A spokesman for Emmaus said: "The donations from St John's have been invaluable to us. Every piece of equipment we receive is inspected to assess if it is suitable for being refurbished and sold, or if it needs



to be responsibly recycled. All proceeds raised through sales in our shop or through our eBay store help us support the 44 people we house who have previously experienced homelessness or social exclusion."

It is not the only recycling initiative at St John's – 40 abandoned bicycles have been donated by the Head Porter to *Recycle Your Cycle*, a charity which works in partnership with HM Prison Service. The cycles are refurbished by prisoners and then sold.

Female fish can breed a new species if they aren't choosy about Mr Right

Fish will mate with a species outside their own if the male's colouring is attractive enough or if the female can't see him properly, according to new research.

Such 'mistakes' in mate choice can lead to the evolution of new species, an international team of scientists found. The group studied 2000 fish and analysed the DNA of more than 400 cichlid fish from two freshwater lakes in East Africa. They discovered more than 40 new species in Lake Mweru, which formed around one million years ago.

Dr Joana Meier, an evolutionary biologist at St John's and lead author of the research, said: "We found a dazzling variety of ecologically diverse new species – called radiations – that were previously unknown."



Film released of Master's memorial service

More than 1000 people gathered at St John's over two days in January to give thanks for the life and work of Professor Sir Christopher Dobson. Two memorials took place to allow as many people as possible to pay their respects to the Master of St John's who died of cancer on September 8 2019. One service was livestreamed and hundreds of people watched it from all over the world. A film of the memorial will be released on the College website. The College flag flew at half-mast on both days to honour Sir Christopher's life and mark his death.

History student wins dissertation competition

'Gifted writer' Sam Willis scooped a £250 prize for his undergraduate dissertation about the political history of the 1990s. Sam, who graduated from St John's last summer with a First in History, won the History of Parliament Trust Dissertation Competition 2019. He is now a postgraduate student at St John's and is currently studying for an MPhil in Modern British History.

Debut album hits right note

The first album released by St John's Voices reached number seven in the Official UK Specialist Classical Chart. The mixed-voice choir's debut, titled *William Mathias Choral Music*, features two major world premiere recordings from the Welsh composer. The album is available to buy on Spotify, Amazon, Apple Music and Presto Classical. St John's Voices sing at Evensong every Monday; follow them on social media for performance details and news.

First vegan 'sustainability dinner' hosted

Chefs from a Michelin-starred restaurant cooked a four-course vegan menu for guests at our inaugural 'Sustainability Dinner'. The event in December was the first of its kind to take place at any Cambridge College and included talks on changing food habits, reducing food waste, and creating exciting vegan meals. Chefs Andreas Antona and Luke Tipping from Simpsons Restaurant in Birmingham, which has held a Michelin star since 2000, cooked for guests at St John's including Fellows, stewards, catering managers and College bursars.

'New' Library celebrates 25 years

A memorial to Professor Robert Hinde, late Fellow and former Master of St John's, has been installed in the Working Library to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the iconic building.

Professor Hinde spearheaded the 'New Library Project' in the early 1990s, which oversaw the creation of a completely new Library facility in Chapel Court, as well as the refurbishment of the historic Lower Library in Third Court. The Working Library was officially opened on 27 September 1994, and receives around 14,000 visits each year.

An engraved hammer, which was presented to Professor Hinde by the construction firm R G Carter on 1 July 1992 to mark the commencement of the building phase, is now on permanent display in the lobby entrance as a memorial to Professor Hinde's enduring contribution to College life.



Family members of the late Professor Robert Hinde at the unveiling of the memorial. Credit: Nordin Catic

Dr Mark Nicholls, College Librarian, said: "The New Library Project marked a complete shift, prioritising junior members' needs for resources and study space above all else. The result is the Working Library we know today: an open, modern and welcoming space, with 120 reader places spread over six floors, and the capacity to house more than 120,000 books."

Television drama written by former chorister shoots scenes in College



Filming for contemporary psychological thriller *The Deceived* recently took place at St John's.

Set in Donegal and a fictitious Cambridge College, the principal filming took place in Ireland. Tobias Beer, a former St John's College Choir chorister, co-wrote the series with his wife Lisa McGee, the screenwriter who created the

Northern Irish sitcom *Derry Girls*.

The four-part drama is described as a 'compelling sinister story of love, manipulation and betrayal'. It stars Emily Reid, pictured on the Bridge of Sighs, as a student called Ophelia who falls in love with her married lecturer. It will be aired on Channel 5.

innocent smoothie entrepreneurs return to talk to students

The brains behind *innocent* smoothies came back to St John's to share the secrets of their success with the next generation of Johnian entrepreneurs.

Jon Wright and Richard Reed, two of the three Johnian founders of *innocent*, talked to students about how they developed the company into a global brand that eventually sold for more than £500m.

The founders were invited to the College by Entrepreneur-in-Residence Dr Sam Cohen and Johnian investor Julian Mash,

following a successful pilot 'Innovation & Development' workshop that took place in the College, designed to inspire budding student entrepreneurs.



Winners of Staff Photography Competition announced



First prize: A fire juggler on the famous San Antonio Sunset Strip in Ibiza by Louise Hanzlik

Two talented photographers won cash prizes in our annual Staff Photography Competition.

The theme for the competition was 'light and shade' and all of the entries were exhibited in the Library. Louise Hanzlik, from the Communications department, won the £100 first prize for her photograph of a fire juggler on the famous San Antonio Sunset Strip in Ibiza.

The £50 second prize went to Paul Everest, Biographical Assistant. Paul captured a remarkable image of the early morning sunlight at St John's. The photograph is titled 'Komorebi on The Avenue'. Komorebi roughly translates from Japanese to English as the 'scattered light that filters through when sunlight shines through trees'.

Two images were also highly commended by the panel of four judges who are all former members of staff. Sarah Hardy, Hospitality Assistant Manager, was Highly Commended for her evocative sunset image



Second prize: Komorebi on The Avenue by Paul Everest

featuring her son-in-law holding her granddaughter when they were all on holiday in Bali in September 2019, and Kerry Swannell, Financial Accountant, was singled out for her striking photo of the Strokkur geyser in Iceland.

Carole Williams, former Catering Accounts Administrator and one of the judges, said: "It was great to see such a wide range of beautiful photos taken by staff at St John's College and to see so many departments represented."

Meet the new JCR Co-Presidents

Restructuring the room ballot system, keeping prices low, and deciding on a name for the summer event: these are just some of the aims for the new JCR Co-Presidents, as Louise Hanzlik learns.



Choosing the name of this year's JCR-hosted summer event could cause a rift between the new Co-Presidents. "I think it should just be called the June Event"; "It should be the June Garden Party"; "It's not really a garden party though, is it?"; "Well, it is taking place in a garden..."

I am chatting to Tim d'Aboville and Candela Louzao Carabel, who

started their new roles in January as Co-Presidents of the Junior Combination Room (JCR), the student-elected committee that represents undergraduates at St John's. The JCR Committee was officially established at St John's in the late 1930s, and today its members attend meetings with senior academics and College leaders, as well as organising events and welfare initiatives.

Despite not agreeing on the event name, it is plain to see that Tim and Candela get on remarkably well. The second-year undergraduates are both international students – Tim lived in America until he was eight and then moved to France, and Candela is from Spain. They have been good friends since starting their studies at St John's after they met at a student night and realised they had a few things

in common, one of them being that they were both from continental Europe.

Tim is reading History and Politics, and Candela is studying Engineering. "I love maths and physics, so I thought, why not engineering! It is a really broad subject, so there will be lots of opportunities in the future."

"I liked the idea of being Co-President with another international student"

Tim, who boxes with the University Boxing Team and also plays football, asked Candela to run with him as Co-President in the elections back in September. "He was actually trying to persuade me as long ago as June!" says Candela. Previously the JCR Facilities Officer, Tim considered running for President alone – at school he was the class rep and head of various societies – but he decided it would work well if he and Candela ran as a duo. "She is well organised and focused, and I liked the idea of being Co-President with another international student."

Candela is from A Coruña, a port city in northwest Spain, and likes cheerleading and water-skiing – although she ruefully acknowledges the latter is not really 'a thing' in Cambridge. She took some persuading to stand, but she is glad that she did. "I did my A-Levels in the UK, but I hadn't done much public speaking in English before, so that was the biggest challenge for me." Like Tim, she was a student rep at her high school. She decided to run alongside him as "we complement each other well. He is more laid back than me – but he's not disorganised!"

The pair won the election with a margin of 19 votes – 177 votes were cast for them. This is the third year that the JCR has had Co-Presidents – Fionn Dillon Kelly and Ben Jones were the first ever Co-Presidents in 2018, followed last year by Anusha Ashok and Oliver Barnard.

Tim and Candela's first task was to put together the new JCR committee, and meet with senior academics and College officers. They then planned their first JCR 'ent' (student social event), Pirates in the Fisher Foyer, followed by their first welfare event featuring universally popular chocolate fountains. "The welfare team organised it, but as Co-Presidents we

have to be involved; we discuss whether events are feasible, oversee them, help out, and put plans into action."

Although Tim and Candela joke around with one another, they are focused. One of their aims is to reform the room ballot system. "Currently, it is a scholars' ballot, where those who do best academically in College are given priority in choosing their accommodation," says Tim. "We don't necessarily want to change that, but we do want to work towards improving the appeal of the rooms outside of College which are often left to those at the bottom of the ballot. We would like to see all freshers living in Cripps in the future."

The Co-Presidents would also like there to be more integration between undergraduates and graduates. "We plan to host several joint events this year where we can work closely with each other and bring everyone together," says Candela.

"If anything goes wrong, the buck stops with us!"

Keeping costs low in College is also high on their agenda. The pair would like to ensure prices in the Buttery and accommodation costs stay as low as possible, and they would like to reduce the price of 'super halls', the themed formal dinners which take place every term. Tim and Candela are also interested in introducing a Virtual Open Day, to allow those who cannot visit St John's in person to experience the College – which they believe would be particularly beneficial for international students. "The first time we both saw St John's was at our interview; we couldn't attend

the actual open day," says Tim. "I actually chose St John's based on its proximity to the History faculty and the football fields – and because it looked nice in photos!"

"It's great to know that we have the power to make change happen – and to really make a difference"

As well as dealing with the day-to-day challenges of being Co-Presidents of the JCR, leading a large (20-people-plus) committee is a challenge in itself. "We want the team to thrive and flourish, and we want to have a good working relationship with everyone, but we also have to ensure we keep control – if anything goes wrong, the buck stops with us," says Tim. "We have a huge responsibility, but we are ready for it."

"We received a lot of advice from Anusha and Ollie," Candela tells me. "They told us that being Co-Presidents can be tough, but there are two of us to help each other out, and to deal with unexpected issues which crop up. But the life experience it gives you is really rewarding."

"It's great to know that we have the power to make change happen – and to really make a difference."

The Co-Presidents are looking forward to organising their big summer event, which takes place in June, during May Week. "We are in the process of setting up the sub-committee for the event. It's less formal than the May Ball, and it's a really nice, popular, relaxing evening. There is a lot of work to do, but it will be a fun night."

"We just need to agree on the name!"



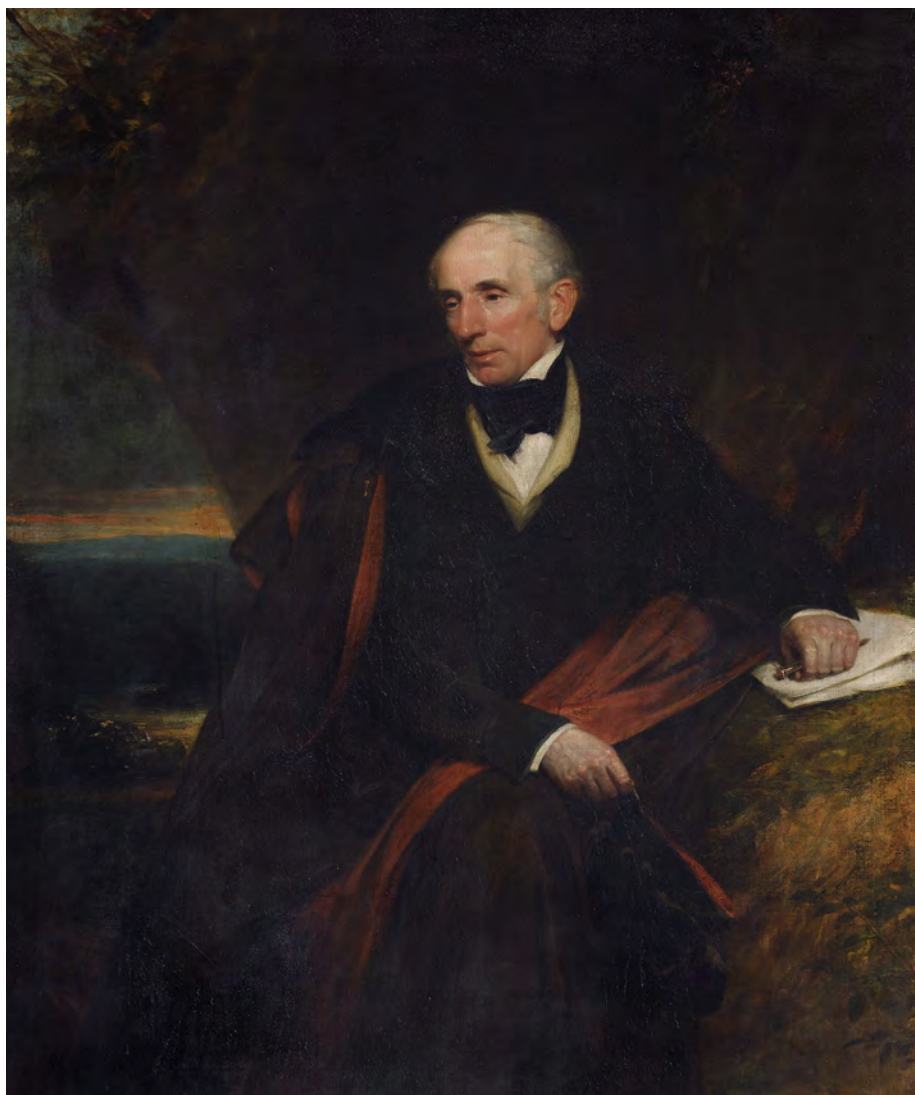
Happy birthday Wordsworth! Celebrating one of the world's greatest poets

2020 marks the 250th anniversary of Romantic poet William Wordsworth's birth. Rebecca Watts, curator of a new Wordsworth exhibition in the Library, reflects on the life of this renowned Johnian.

When the seventeen-year-old William Wordsworth arrived in Cambridge in October 1787, he wasn't exactly bowled over by what he saw. 'It was a dreary morning when the chaise / Roll'd over the flat plains of Huntingdon', he later recalled in his book-length autobiographical poem *The Prelude*. A native of Cumbria, he had spent his childhood and school years roaming free amid the dramatic fells and picturesque lakes of northwest England. By contrast, the 'three gloomy courts' that comprised St John's at that time (New Court was yet to be built) held little inspiration for him. He complained of the 'humming sound, less tuneable than bees' coming from the College kitchens directly below his room on F staircase, First Court, and of the noise from 'Trinity's loquacious clock' and 'pealing organ', both adjacent to his window.

It's perhaps not surprising that he shirked his 'College labours' and 'the Lecturer's room', choosing instead to 'pace alone the level fields' beyond the city's confines. Passionate about literature from an early age, as an undergraduate he read widely, and also studied Italian. Unfortunately, his knowledge of literature was of little use when it came to sitting his exams, because the Cambridge curriculum in the late eighteenth century was predominantly mathematical. Having been awarded a scholarship on the basis of academic merit in his first term, he saw his marks steadily dwindle, and in January 1791 he graduated without honours.

Was it in spite of, or thanks to his indifference to academic life that



Portrait of Wordsworth by Henry William Pickersgill (1833). The original oil painting hangs in the Hall.

Wordsworth went on to become one of the world's best-loved poets? His older brother Christopher had excelled at Cambridge, and via a distinguished career in the Church became Master of Trinity College. William, by contrast, was

a rebel spirit. In the decade after leaving St John's he moved between London, Revolutionary France, southwest England and Germany, deriving inspiration from the places he visited and the people he met, and developing his own radical

ideas about politics, philosophy and poetry.

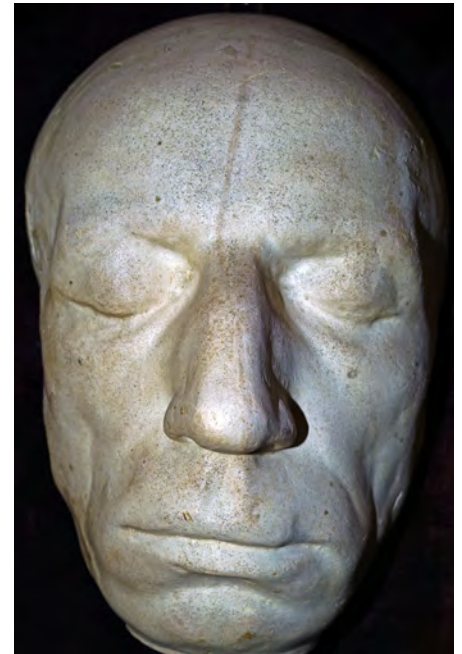
By the time he returned to his native Lake District in December 1799, he had published three volumes of poetry, and had inherited a modest legacy from a friend which enabled him to live independently and pursue his literary ambitions. Over the course of the following decade he wrote some of the most memorable and enduringly popular poems in the English language, including the daffodils poem ('I wandered lonely as a cloud') – which was inspired by reading his sister Dorothy's description of daffodils in her journal, two years after they had both encountered them when out walking on the shore of Ullswater.

While it's easy to imagine Wordsworth – later Poet Laureate to Queen Victoria – as the archetypal Romantic poet, literary success did not come to him straight away. His landmark volume of poetry, *Lyrical Ballads* (a collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge) left the critics baffled when it was first published in 1798, and Wordsworth was forced to add a lengthy preface to the second edition, explaining the key ideas behind his radical poetic 'experiments'. Throughout his career, his work was championed by some and ridiculed by others. Reviewing *The Excursion* (1814), a book-length

poem Wordsworth composed as a companion-piece to *The Prelude*, one critic commented: 'This will never do. [...] The case of Mr Wordsworth, we perceive, is now manifestly hopeless; and we give him up as altogether incurable, beyond the power of criticism.'

An original printed copy of this wonderfully savage review is just one of the items from the College's Wordsworth Collection currently on display in the Library Exhibition Area, as part of an exhibition to celebrate Wordsworth's 250th birthday. The exhibition tells the story of Wordsworth's time at St John's, as well as charting his friendships with some of the greatest poets and artists of his time, and reflecting on his literary career and his enduring reputation.

Alongside manuscripts, original correspondence and first editions of Wordsworth's published works, the exhibition showcases some unique artefacts – including his breakfast tea cup, and a 'life mask' (a cast of his face) made by the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon when Wordsworth was 45. If you think he looks rather serious, imagine him in a dressing gown, with his face smothered in wet plaster and straws stuck up his nose, sitting perfectly still while his friends peeked round the door to laugh at him. According to Haydon's diary, when the cast was removed



Wordsworth's life mask (1815)

Wordsworth 'came into breakfast with his usual cheerfulness and delighted & awed us by his illustrations & bursts of inspiration.'

■ **Wordsworth at 250 is open to all, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm in the Library Exhibition Area, until 24 April 2020.**

■ **An online version of the exhibition is also available to view on the College website at www.joh.cam.ac.uk/online-exhibitions.**

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee: –
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

(1815 version)



The race is on for the former soldier raising money for veterans

Postgraduate student Gav Topley talks to Jo Tynan about juggling his London Marathon training regime with his PhD.



Gav Topley is entertaining company – he has stories about everything, from his first job as a trainee falconer to being imprisoned in Bangkok for a week.

What should have been a quick chat about his marathon training turned into a much livelier conversation about why Gav thinks we should all stop having children (climate change), and whether the British Army should continue to recruit under-18s (his PhD will cover that). And in case you were wondering, the jail time was because of a damaged passport, not a Bridget Jones-style drugs bust.

Nothing about Gav is conventional – his marathon training programme sees him hitting the College gym at 1am, and his journey to Cambridge didn't follow a standard pattern of GCSEs, A-levels, undergraduate degree, Master's, and then onto a PhD. Gav explains: "I'm from an ex-mining community where the attitude towards education is that people think you are prattling about and need to get a proper job. At 16 I did just that and dropped out of my A-levels and moved out of the family home in Nottingham to start a live-in role as a falconer in North Yorkshire."

At 17 years old Gav decided to join the Army where he continued to work with animals by training to be a Veterinary Technician. During his four years of service in Kosovo, Germany and the UK, he was responsible for looking after a menagerie of military animals including horses and dogs.

"I had some great experiences that I wouldn't have been able to have without being in the Army, and I made friends



Gav and a group of graduate students on matriculation day when they formally became members of St John's

for life. I left because I never intended it to be my long-term career. The things I value most in life are friends, time and freedom. The Army is very structured and you need to do what they need you to do when they need you to do it – it doesn't leave much room for spontaneity. I'm now an Army Reserve soldier providing support for the parachute regiment as a combat medic, so it is still a part of my life."

"There is always going to be the train of thought that we shouldn't be recruiting 'poor working class children' to fight rich men's wars"

Gav spent several years working in a secure unit for young offenders, and in social care and youth justice and education, before he applied for a place on a degree course at Bournemouth University. "I kind of blagged my way onto the course. Deep down I realised I had always wanted to go to university but I didn't even have A-levels. I didn't know if going to university was something someone from my background could do, but I did know I needed to give it a go. Luckily the course director took a chance on me as she thought my work experience showed I had the aptitude."

He graduated with a 2:1 in Communications and Media and spent several months

travelling across South East Asia before he was unceremoniously deported back to the UK because his passport had been damaged by hand gel. The prison 'bed bugs, cockroaches, and awful food' didn't put Gav off and he soon returned to Asia to teach English to secondary-school children in Vietnam.

Gav worked full-time with care leavers whilst he was doing his Master's in Leeds, and it was an invitation from a social media friend that led him to St John's when he was trying to decide whether to apply to Cambridge.

"Everyone I met on that visit irrespective of their background, level of study or course was really friendly and eager to chat. People are more interested in what you have got to say than where you went to school. I fell in love with St John's and I still walk through College snapping photos for social media every day. I thought my interview went terribly but it can't have been that bad because here I am!"

The postgraduate student is now in the second term of his PhD research, which focuses on the impact on young people of the British Army's policy of recruiting and training 16-year-olds.

"I'm doing a PhD because I believe the research needs to happen. I wanted to do it at Cambridge because the research

will carry more weight. I'm gathering perspectives from people who joined the Army under the age of 18. Some have told me they enlisted because they want to fight for their country, others because they are disenfranchised with school. A huge number have described their difficult backgrounds and explained that the Army appeals to them because of the structure and routine.

"I'm from an ex-mining community where the attitude towards education is that people think you are prating about and need to get a proper job"

"There is always going to be the train of thought that we shouldn't be recruiting 'poor working class children' to fight rich men's wars and I get that, but many former child recruits have told me that if they hadn't signed up they would be in prison or dead. The Army is in effect a safer choice for them. My research will give them a platform so they have a voice in what can be a very middle-class debate."

Gav has also turned his attention to raising money for ABF The Soldiers' Charity, which provides vital support to soldiers, veterans and their families. He will be running the London Marathon on Sunday 26 April 2020. But even while he is in training, Gav is thinking about his next challenge – he has applied to become a magistrate (he wants the cross-section of society) and ultimately wants to be a medical doctor. And Gav strikes me as one of those people who doesn't just talk about doing things – he gets on and does them.



Teenage Gav as a Veterinary Technician in the Army

To sponsor Gav visit [justgiving.com/fundraising/gav-topley](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/gav-topley)

Picture the scene



King's Parade, an original illustration by Laura Jones

Laura Jones is new to St John's – she joined the College as the Accommodation and Bookings Co-ordinator in December, and has lived in Cambridge for a year after moving down from her hometown, Lincoln.

She is the first point of contact for the day-to-day bookings and administration of the College guest rooms. She is also a talented illustrator, so when she's not in the office making sure everyone from conference guests to students are looked after, Laura is outdoors sketching, taking photographs, and designing city maps.

She said: "I've always loved drawing and painting. I did a degree in Illustration at Norwich University of the Arts and graduated in 2014. I've done some work for the publisher Archant, illustrating articles for their magazines, and a few years ago I was proud to be asked to do the cover design for their special 200th edition Christmas issue of EDP Norfolk Magazine."

Laura recently designed the artwork for quirky local maps of Norwich. She explained: "The project went well, and the maps are on sale in gift shops in

Norwich. I have since designed one for Lincoln, and I am working on a map for Cambridge which will be available in local galleries. I'm also going to be designing a Peak District map – it's a good excuse for another trip there!"

To create her maps, Laura does around 20 drawings of local sites. She said: "I scan the drawings onto the computer and then shrink them down. I then get a tourist map and trace over the streets, enlarge the map, and afterwards I paint it and add the buildings in. It takes about a week from start to finish."

As well as designing maps, Laura has been busy creating greetings cards, gift tags, and patterned wrapping paper which she sells at craft fairs including Lincoln Christmas Market. She loves taking photographs and always carries her sketchbook around with her wherever she goes.

Laura recently designed the cover of her friend Samantha Maw's poetry book *Goat on a Bike*. Last year she took a children's book illustration course, and she is now working with Samantha on a children's book called *The Zoo's New Shoes*. She said: "It started off as a quick picture book

showing animals dressed up in funny shoes, but people really seemed to like it so we're going to turn it into a full-length picture book with a storyline. That's this year's big project!"

To see more of Laura's work visit www.laurajonesillustrations.com





10-minute interview

With Dr Steve Edgley, neuroscientist and President of St John's

You have been a Fellow of St John's for more than 30 years. What brought you to the College?

I studied for a PhD in Bristol and worked as a postdoc in Sweden before coming to Cambridge as a lecturer in Biological Sciences. In my first year I supervised next door at Magdalene College, but was recruited by St John's in 1989 to teach neuroscience and anatomy to medical students.

Can you tell us about your work as a neuroscientist?

Most of my neuroscience work over the last 10 years has been about trying to understand how we learn to move accurately. Our everyday movements are performed with very little conscious thought, and yet they are remarkably precise. A key thing about movement control is that it is not reactive, but proactive – you have to predict what is needed in advance. Human movement is incredibly sophisticated – robots may be able to beat people at chess but there isn't a robot yet that can tie a shoelace as well as a five-year-old.

Why did you decide to stand for election as President?

You don't really put yourself forward, others come and use their skills to

persuade you to be nominated – people I respect very much twisted my arm.

It is a big and very diverse role, and on the whole it has been fun – so far. It is a privilege to be part of St John's, I never tire of hearing about people's research, meeting students and staff, and going to fascinating talks and incredible concerts – it is a fantastic community. I'm more involved in College than I have been for many years.

What does the President of St John's actually do?

At its simplest, the President represents the views of the Fellowship, inside and outside the College. The more complex part is standing in for the Master when the Master is not available or is away. Those two things form the core of what the President does for four years before the term is up. And there are all of those committees...

What are you hoping to achieve as President?

I'll do my best to make sure the College remains a functioning collegial place. Our students have phenomenal potential and I hope that we can continue our mission to enable them to realise it. I have huge respect for the Fellowship, it is full of amazingly able people who have fascinating stories to tell.

What are the challenges?

The demands on academics in the wider University mean many people working in the sciences are not as involved with Colleges as they would have been in the past, and an increasing proportion are not involved with Colleges at all. Colleges are absolutely fundamental to the success of the University, as teaching and learning are right at the heart of what Colleges do. Support for the Collegiate system is threatened if new academics choose not to get involved – that's one of the big challenges all Colleges face.

What is a day in the life of the President of St John's like?

Being President is in addition to my day job as a researcher and as Head of Teaching in the University's Physiology Development and Neuroscience Department. I'm supposed to spend about a day and a half a week in College – it seems like more, but no two days are likely to be the same. Many varied issues pop up unexpectedly with the dreaded words "have you got just a minute?". The role definitely involves a lot of long meetings about important things and sometimes about not quite such important things!

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Free time is a rare commodity. Like a lot of academics, my research is my major hobby. I'm interested in the natural world, and spend a lot of time in the garden. I like reading and walking in remote places – the more remote the better. I've got three children that I don't see enough of at different universities across the UK.

What is the life of an academic like?

It is a vocation. All of us put in long hours, so relatively few of us have the same level of free time as most people in the outside world. The problem with research is that you're only as good as your most recent work – what you did 20 years ago is often forgotten, and there are lots of really bright people snapping at your heels. That keeps you awake at night.



A YEAR AT ST JOHN'S



1,617 IT Help Desk queries answered

147

new Windows 10 computers rolled out in **49** days

250

used computer items donated to charity

COMMUNICATIONS

21 hours of oral history recorded with the Master

1 new intranet launched

MAINTENANCE

160 rooms painted
2,680 recycling bins emptied

BOAT HOUSE
first crews spent **15** hours a week training

PORTERS

responded to **192** fire alarms & registered **1,033** bikes

STUDENT SERVICES

replaced **121** lost University cards

COLLEGE CHOIR

St John's Voices' debut album hit No **7** in the charts

7 overseas concerts for **6,750** people



ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATORS
1,995 interviews organised for **914** candidates over 12 days

UNDERGRAD ADMISSIONS

1,201 applications received from **68** different countries

HOUSEKEEPING

300 mattresses replaced

DOMESTIC BURSAR'S OFFICE

60 sets of minutes written

CHAPEL

1,100 people welcomed to **2** memorial services for the Master

DEVELOPMENT

13,000 alumni receive monthly newsletter
418 financial awards given to **255** undergraduates

HEALTH CENTRE

422 face-to-face student appointments
133 students supported by the College counsellor

GARDENS

12,000 plants grown from seed
4,000 hours cutting grass

FINANCE

14,243 invoices processed
4,874 payslips issued

CATERING

22,000 pints of beer served in the College bar

2,643 wellness teas/coffees served to students

MASTER'S & PRESIDENT'S OFFICES

1,400 registrations for **4** Research Fellowships

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & SENIOR TUTOR'S OFFICE

5 new teaching Fellows recruited

ACCOMMODATION & BOOKINGS

2,831 meeting rooms booked in the Old Divinity School and Fisher Building

LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

The Biographical Office responded to **500** enquiries about Johnians across **5** centuries

HUMAN RESOURCES

66 recruitment campaigns
1 online HR and payroll system launched

GRAD ADMISSIONS

497 applications received

PLAYING FIELDS

1,800 people used sports grounds